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Changes to PSLE scoring make for a fairer system

The changes to the Primary School Leaving Examination scoring system and how it will be used for admission to secondary schools are scientifically sound and practically sensible ("New PSLE scoring system to have 8 grade bands"; Thursday).

The changes affect the future of our children, so it is important to take the time to understand the new system and not jump to the wrong conclusions.

The changes make the system more valid and fair, and will benefit all students regardless of their academic performance levels.

Replacing the narrow T-scores with the wider PSLE Achievement Level scores does not make academic achievement unimportant.

In fact, it makes the PSLE scores more valid.

Small differences in T-scores are not meaningful, and they do not reflect true differences in academic abilities or potential between students. The eight levels of academic achievement are more accurate as a measure to make inferences about a student's academic performance and potential.

As the achievement level scores are more valid, using them as academic indicators when making admission decisions to secondary schools becomes fairer.

Another important change is factoring in the student's choice of secondary school when deciding which student is to be admitted to a school when their academic achievements are essentially the same.

While all schools will provide quality academic education, they will differ in the focus of non-academic development, be it a specific sport or life skill, an area of the arts or community service.

If a student chooses a school because its non-academic focus matches his interest, passion or aptitude, then the student will be more motivated and more likely to do well in that area.

Most importantly, students will enjoy the important years of their school life. They will finish their studies in secondary school and move on to pursue the next phase of education or training, which will further develop their knowledge, skills and interests.

They will be much more likely to

lead successful and fulfilling lives when they grow up and enter the workforce.

Of course, for this to happen, schools will need time to develop their various non-academic areas of excellence.

That is why implementing the changes in 2021 is good timing. It also allows sufficient time for today's parents with Primary 1 or younger children to discover and develop their children's interests.

The PSLE scoring and admission process to secondary schools are early stages in a child's education, and they do not completely predetermine the future of the child. But they are certainly important stages and parents understandably care a lot about them.

The changes to the PSLE system improve the scoring and admission process, but more importantly, they are more aligned with wanting the best for our children and developing their potential and interests, both academic and non-academic, so that they grow up to become successful in whatever they end up doing.

David Chan (Professor)